

67 My dad always insisted that when Dizzy Dean did national TV games in the 1950s that he intentionally mispronounced Pittsburgh as Pissburgh.

Here come the Cubs

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We all acted cool and said things like, “I’m just glad they’re good again,” or “I want them to win, but even if they don’t, it’s been a great season.” We didn’t mean any of it. When Starlin snagged Francisco Cervelli’s soft liner to end the wild card game and Virgil Patrick Hughes said, “Goodbye Pittsburgh, hello St. Louis!” he spoke for us all.

This incredible season. This unlikely, awesome, thrill a minute season couldn’t end in Pissburgh⁶⁷, of all places. The Cubs needed to go to St. Louis. They needed to face the red menace and send them packing. And now, they get their chance.

I’m old enough (and probably just about all of you are, too) to remember the feeling before game six in the 2003 NLCS. You had to sit around all day getting more and more excited, and more and more nervous, just to get to the damned game. That was yesterday. It all came back.

The omens were flashing before me. Dusty Fucking Baker was on the TBS pregame show. The Cubs took a 3-0 lead (just like they did for Mark Prior and just like they’d done in game five in San Diego for Rick Sutcliffe in 1984). I just needed one more run to get me back in off that ledge.

And Dexter Fowler obliged.

Arrieta was cruising. The TBS guys could talk all they wanted about how many “hard hit” balls the Pirates had, but none of that really seemed to matter.

Then Addison Russell couldn’t handle a double play ball from Andrew McCutchen, and instead of the sixth inning being over the bases were loaded and Starling Marte was coming up as the go-ahead run.

But on the replay you noticed something. Addison made a

nice play. His first goal was to keep the ball in the infield, so he slid to surround it. It had taken a weird hop off the back of the mound and handcuffed him, but he kept it in front of him and almost got an out anyway. This wasn't Alex Gonzalez ham handing a slowly bouncing double play ball.

Addison didn't need redemption, but Marte obliged, and despite a less than perfect toss, Starlin turned it without a problem. Anthony Rizzo barely waited to catch the throw at first to start fist pumping. The Cubs still needed to get nine more outs, but the game was over.

You don't get many chances on Jake, as evidenced by the "rally" that was a 14 hop ground ball single, a hit batter and an infield hit (later ruled an error). When the Pirates didn't capitalize on that, you knew they wouldn't get enough other chances.

Arrieta became the first player in baseball history (think about that) to throw a shutout in the postseason with four hits or fewer and 10 or more strikeouts (he had 11) and no walks.⁶⁸

But the indelible image of this game will forever be this:

Baseball sage Phil Rogers openly questioned having Schwarber but not Coghlan in the lineup that night, citing Kyle's .208 batting average in September. Never mind that Schwarber still was getting on base at a .352 clip even when was struggling.

There was never a doubt whether Kyle would be in the lineup, just where.

He was in right field which is smaller in PNC Park than left, with Kris Bryant starting out there and Tommy La Stella at third. When the Cubs lead grew to 4-0, Joe put Austin Jackson in left and moved KB back to third, where he made two excellent plays, including a Rolen-esque grab to start a double play in the seventh.

68 Jake was not as sharp as he had been during his incredible second half rampage through both leagues where he went 12-1 with a 0.75 ERA in the second half. But he was plenty good in the Wild Card game. And his stare nearly melted then ESPN writer Sahadev Sharma who asked him how he got through "without his best stuff."

When it was all over, the Cubs eschewed a gaudy celebration. They simply shook hands on the field, shared a round of huzzahs and boarded a train to St. Louis.

Oh, fuck that. They went crazy.

They partied like they won the World Series. But hell, they pretty much do this after every win (sans the champagne). I'm sure a haughty group of St. Louisians were aghast at the display. Good. I hope it drove them crazier.

There's a reason you celebrate after advancing in the play-offs. It's hard to win. And it's fun. And while the Yankees and Cardinals can act like celebrating anything short of a pennant is beneath them, they're wrong.

Baseball's supposed to be fun, and that's just how the Cubs treat it. It may piss you off to watch them beat your ass and grin from ear to ear while they do it, but they don't care. They don't even notice. This is about them, it's not about you. You're just the obstacle.

Way back when it first started to really look like these Cubs were going to the playoffs, I envisioned a roadmap that included beating Gerrit Cole in the wild card game and then heading to St. Louis to FUCK SHIT UP.

That time is here. It's really happening. After 120 years of playing each other, the Cubs and Cardinals are finally going to meet in the playoffs. And the Cardinals fans are scared shitless. Their phony air of superiority is completely dependent on the Cubs never beating them when it really matters. Well, it matters now. And despite the fact that the best pitcher on the planet can't start until game three, the Cubs can still win this series even if they only win games pitched by Jon Lester and by Jake.

Early in the year the Cubs kept finding ways to lose to the Cardinals, and Joe said he was looking forward to coming back later in the season when his guys had figured it out. And then the Cubs came back in September and the

Cardinals didn't like what they saw. The Cubs boast the most talented roster in the National League. Not all of that talent is fully formed yet, but it's there, and all of it knows that they can beat the Cardinals. They don't just believe it, they've done it.

This is going to be great.

The Cardinals have a long and proud history of success.

Well, they're going to need it.

They'll need something to cling to after the Cubs are done with them.